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1st Beach Closing Due to Birds, Tide

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

A "banner year" for the endangered piping plover may also mean a good year for beachgoers, although at first glance, it may not seem so, as Duxbury beach was closed on Sunday for the first time this summer and it was because of the birds.

The 15 nesting pairs of the speckled, sand-colored shore birds have caused the harbor-master's department to limit the number of over-sand vehicles on the beach to 360, a

decrease from the 500-vehicle front-beach limit.

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—Harbormaster Don Beers

At the Monday night selectmen's meeting, Harbor-master Don Beers reported that on Sunday, non-residents met their 180-vehicle capacity by 11:15 am. The beach did

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not reopen to non-residents until 3:15 pm, he said. There were only 81 residents on the beach and they never reached the limit and were not turned away, as is usually the case, Beers said.

However, the piping plovers have been so successful in nesting and their young in fledging, or flying away from the area, that they will probably be gone early in the season, leaving the beach to its human inhabitants, said Beers.

"It's a banner year," Beers said. "They arrived early, fledged early and then they'll leave early."

Fortunately, the family of piping plovers nesting in the area where the July 3rd bonfire will be built on Saturday just fledged this week, so "the bonfire is good to go," Beers said.

The beach owner, the Duxbury Beach Reservation Inc., pays for a full-time endangered species officer in the harbormaster's department to manage the piping plover population. There are also bird monitors, usually college students, who watch the birds during the day to keep people and animals away from the nests.

Closing the beach posed a "challenge" for Beers as it does every time, he said. His

department knew on Sunday they would have a reduced over-sand vehicle capacity based on the birds' locations, and the tide and sea conditions. However, this summer his department has new measures for making the closings go more smoothly.

First, the harbormaster's staff puts up new "Beach Closed" signs at St. George St. and new detour signs. They also notify local radio station WATD, 95.9 FM, to broadcast the closures as soon as they occur. Also, the harbormaster's staff will begin turning away vehicles before they cross the Powder Point Bridge. Finally, Beers said that during closures, the Reservation has given non-residents the option of parking in the Blakeman's 1,400 space parking lot in the public Duxbury beach park area, which is usually accessed through Marshfield.

Beers wants beachgoers to know that his department takes the closings seriously.

"We have limited space out there," Beers said. "They should expect delays and restrictions on sunny days, both weekdays and weekends. They should believe those signs — I wouldn't hang them if it wasn't true."

Beers said he expects that the 500-vehicle capacity on the beach will return by early next week.